

# **AN EXALTED NAME**

**by Richard Gamble**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The book of Hebrews begins abruptly by jumping right into its major theme: the uniqueness and finality of God's revelation in his Son Jesus Christ. In just the first four verses, six important truths are proclaimed about Jesus Christ. Three of these relate to him as the eternal Son of God, while three speak of his earthly work.

Here we will focus our attention on the three truths related to his earthly work. But while we do so, must keep in mind that knowledge of Christ's saving work for us can never be separated from knowledge of who Christ is himself. Also, we must remember that knowledge about Christ differs from all other types of knowledge. A physician knows more about our bodies than we do, and that knowledge affects him — he often sees the world differently from us. The same is true of farmers, builders, teachers, and many others. As Christians, we will see that knowledge of Christ doesn't just affect us, but it transforms our very being.

As study Christ's work through Hebrews 1:1-4, the one main point we will emphasize is that everything Christ has received we have also received.

## **II. COMPARISONS AND CONTRASTS**

The initial two verses of Hebrews are set in a rather beautiful threefold structure of comparisons and contrasts:

- 1) The Son of God is set in contrast to the prophets. Whereas God spoke long ago by the *prophets*, he speaks in these last days by the *Son*.
- 2) We are contrasted to the Old Testament fathers. God spoke long ago to the *fathers*, but now he speaks to us.
- 3) The diverse ways in which God spoke with the fathers are compared with the final revelation given to us in Christ. Long ago God spoke at *various times*, and he speaks to us now, at the end of times.

Even though diversity exists in the Testaments, the one true God authored both revelations. God's word is always true, and he has spoken truth to both in common. Although there is a difference, an expansion, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, it is a mistake to say that the differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament are fundamental. The Old Testament is not "law" while the New Testament is "gospel."

The comparison as a whole is beautiful. Jesus, like the former prophets, spoke the word of God, yet unlike the prophets he *is* the eternal Word who became the Word incarnate.<sup>1</sup> Christ's uniqueness is apparent in that he is a Son, different from all the prophets that went before him.

Further, we are living in a time of greater revelation, in that we live in the days when the Son of God has been revealed. We are in a condition that is superior to those who lived under the Old Testament economy. The diversity that is referred to in the first verse indicates that the visions and other various means by which God revealed Himself were not complete. If the way had God revealed Himself had been

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<sup>1</sup>This passage brings us into immediate connection with the beginning of the gospel of John, and the theological connection between this passage in Hebrews is very similar to what John is saying in his gospel.

perfect and complete, then it would not have been necessary for the completed revelation.

The passage also points out a distinct contrast between the former times and this final age. The former age was marked by incompleteness and anticipation, the final age by completeness and fulfillment. The former was preliminary, but the final is ultimate. This is a fundamental contrast in Hebrews, whereby the old order of prophetic utterances, Mosaic covenant, and Levitical priesthood has given way to the new, final and permanent messianic reality. Its leadership, its priesthood, and its kingdom belong uniquely to him who is the eternal Son. The expression of “this final age,” “at the extremity of the days (of history),” occurs a dozen times in the Old Testament to designate the future time of the Messiah. Now, there is no longer any reason to expect any new revelation because Christ did not bring a partial Word, but the final conclusion.<sup>2</sup>

In speaking this way, it may sound as if we find only discontinuity between the testaments. But the continuity is evident as well. In both the old order and the new it is none other than God almighty who speaks — and notice that he spoke to *our* fathers as well as to *us*. There is a consistency that pervades the whole teaching; the new covenant in Christ is the realization of the promises, prophecies and figures, which form the heart of the old order. Christ is the final word of the prophets.

Therefore, before we actually finish the second verse of this epistle, the whole theme is set forth. There is a unique supremacy in Jesus Christ that surpasses the incomplete character of all religion and

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<sup>2</sup>Paul says the same thing in 1 Cor. 10:11, “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.” This truth has two practical implications, the first being that in Jesus Christ God has spoken for the last time; we need not go beyond Christ looking for further revelations or prophecies or speaking in tongues. The second is that we should not come short of Christ, that is, be content that the fullness of all of God’s revelation is found in the Old Testament, as the Jews do.

prophecy before Him.<sup>3</sup> God has spoken to us by a Son, who is the true Word of God, just as he truly spoke by the prophets of old. God is the author of both the Old and New Covenants, and Christ's presence is the completing of God's prophecy.

### III. CHRIST

**The Creator.** In the last half of the second verse,<sup>4</sup> the Son of God is called the creator of the world. Since Christ is the creator of the world, He must have existed from all eternity, from time before time began.<sup>5</sup>

**The Heir.** Besides being the creator of all things, he is the appointed heir of all things. The "appointed heir" is a direct reference to Christ's mediatorial work. This verse is connected with Psalm 2:8, "Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession." This reference in Psalm 2 falls within the context of the Son who is begotten of the Father.

**The Glory of God.** Jesus is the heir and creator of all things, and is also in a relationship to the Father. He reflects the glory of God and bears the stamp of his nature.<sup>6</sup> This is not abstract theology, but an important doctrine of the faith. The Father's glory, which is invisible, is

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<sup>3</sup>We have here another reflection of the teaching of Paul who says in 2 Tim. 3:16, that all Scripture is God-breathed; for we are reminded that it was *God* who spoke by the prophets

<sup>4</sup> Note the similarity in presentation between Hebrews and the Gospel of John: God's Word, mentioned in the first chapter of John, who was in the beginning with God, created all things.

<sup>5</sup> Again this is found in Paul, in Col. 1:16 and 1 Cor. 8:6: in him and through him all things without exception were created.

<sup>6</sup> There is a correlation here with John's witness in John 1:14, that "we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father." This agrees with Paul in 2 Cor. 4:6 concerning "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

seen in Christ. In fact, it is in Christ that the glory of God is fully manifest. The majesty of the Father is impressed upon the Son and seen in Him. The author's purpose here was not to demonstrate metaphysically the likeness that the Father bears to the Son. Rather, it was to build up our faith, "so that we may learn that God is made known to us in no other way than in Christ."<sup>7</sup>

**Upholder.** That the Son is creator also means that he upholds the universe by the word of his power. From the beginning God created the heavens and earth according to his own plan and purpose. As he upholds the universe, we see a dynamic activity, something that has not stopped happening but continues. God continues to uphold the universe by the word of his power. If God did not continue to sustain the world each and every moment, the world would lapse into non-existence. The Son is the radiant light of the glory of God, the perfect copy of his nature. He upholds the universe.

**Mediator.** The Son has also made purification for our sins. He has done this once for all time, during human history. That activity was performed in his being incarnate, living a life of humiliation, suffering the death upon the cross, and being raised from the grave. After these events were accomplished, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. He was received into heavenly glory in order that he might govern all things. This salvation that Christ acquired for us was not a temporary thing, for he has *eternally* taken a seat on high. We do not see him now, but that is a cause for our rejoicing! He has received nothing less than the kingdom given to him by the Father.<sup>8</sup> It is in heaven that Jesus Christ is making intercession on our behalf (Heb. 7:25).

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<sup>7</sup>John recounted Jesus' saying in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of his gospel: "He who has seen me has seen the Father"; and Paul reminds us that Christ is the image or likeness of God (2 Cor. 4:4).

<sup>8</sup>As Paul wrote in Philippians 2, "God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that

There is a particular context in which we should understand how Christ is being honored. The reference is to the Son of God as the Mediator, who for our redemption humbled himself. For a little while he was lower than the angels, but has now become, once and for all, superior to the angels.

**Inheritor of an Exalted Name.** Christ has also inherited a name that is superior to any of the angels. The reference here is at least twofold. In the ancient Near East, a person's name was more important than we consider it to be today. A name signified the character, or at least the hoped-for character, of a Person. More important than that is the meaning behind inheriting this name.<sup>9</sup> This superior name speaks of the supreme honor that is due Christ.

These four brief verses have much to say concerning our Savior. We learn of him as the Prophet of God, as the Priest who makes intercession for our sins, and as the mighty King who now rules over heaven and earth. *It is a fact* that Jesus Christ was born in a low estate, and made full atonement for our sins. *It is a fact* that he has been exalted on high. We also know that we, as believers in Jesus Christ, have been made sons and daughters in his Sonship, and that we will see Him as he is at the day of Resurrection. The movement of God in history is complete, from Old Testament hidden to New Testament revealed. He has received a name above every other name! He is Lord

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Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” Here is the classic doctrine of Christ in his three offices as Prophet, Priest and King. For as the Prophet the Father spoke by him, as Priest he has made purification for our sins, and as King he sits at the right hand of God.

<sup>9</sup> The is the same as Paul's argument in Eph. 1:19ff. where he speaks of “the immeasurable greatness of God's power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might, which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.” The same may be seen in Phil. 2:9ff.

and will never be defeated! He will never again appear in an estate of humiliation!

#### IV. CHRIST AS HEIR: REDEEMED AS HEIRS.

Christ's work as Heir, as Mediator and as Inheritor has implications for us. The work of Christ is applied, at least in part, to us as well.

**As Mediator.** The ground for applying Christ's work to us is found in Hebrews 1:3b: "After he had made purification for sins" — obviously not for his (non-existent) sins. "Having made purification for sins" is part of the package of descriptions of this Son of God. It was Christ's work as mediator that was in the author's mind when he described Christ as "having made purification for sins." Christ mediates between the Holy God who cannot stand sin, and sinners like us.

**As Heir.** Christ took upon Himself the role of heir so that he might rescue what *we* had lost in Adam. Adam was the heir of all good things, but in his sin that inheritance was lost. Throughout the New Testament, Christians too are called "heirs and sons," yet that idea cannot be understood outside of Christ being the first heir, the Redeemer of God's covenant people.<sup>10</sup> It is through the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ that we become heirs.<sup>11</sup>

**As Inheritor of an Exalted Name.** Christ's name is exalted. We bear his name as Christians. Therefore, we too have an exalted name. Our earthly names may not be very exalted, but our supernatural spiritual name "little Christs" (the meaning of "Christian"), is exalted.

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<sup>10</sup> Paul expresses this beautifully in 1 Cor. 3:21ff. When he assures the believers that since they are Christ's and Christ is God's, all things are theirs.

<sup>11</sup> This teaching of verse 2 is made more complete in v. 10 when Psalm 102 is applied to the Son who founded the earth in the beginning, and made the heavens by the work of his hands. Yet in the Old Testament, this Psalm is addressed to the

Our God is a powerful God and we are his people; what a cause for rejoicing! The mighty Jesus Christ will never leave us nor forsake us. He is in control of all things. All praise to his powerful name!

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Lord, to Yahweh who is the eternal Sovereign of all things. Jesus Christ is the eternal, sovereign God of all things, creator of heaven and earth!